

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAIGON 02938 151449Z

44

ACTION EA-10

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INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

AID-05 IGA-01 IO-10 DPW-01 OMB-01 EB-07 TRSE-00 /074 W

----- 073072

R 150940Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3690

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

/AMCONSUL DANANG 8721

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 2938

DEPT PASS IMMEDIATE IBS/NCS

E.O. 116)*: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJECT: PRIVATE OPINIONS OF OPPOSITION LEADERS ON US AID TO
VIETNAM

1. OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE RADICAL
OPPOSITION HAVE DECLARED THEMSELVES AS OPPOSED TO FURTHER US
AID TO VIETNAM SO LONG AS PRES THIEU REMAINED IN OFFICE. TWO
OF THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE GROUPS WERE THE LOWER HOUSE
OPPOSITION DEPUTIES, 47 OF WHOM SIGNED A LETTER OPPOSING AID
TO THIEU AND THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION FORCE (NRF) WHICH
DELIVERED A DECLARATION TO CODEL FLYNT TO THIS EFFECT.

2. WE HAVE HAD NUMEROUS INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRIVATE
OPINIONS OF THESE POLITICIANS ARE LESS EXTREME THAN THEIR
PUBLIC STATEMENTS. DEPUTY VO LONG TRIEU, ONE OF THOSE LISTED
AS A SIGNER OF LETTER OF 47 AND PUBLISHER OF LEADING OPPOSITION
NEWSPAPER, DAI DAN TOC, IS A CASE IN POINT. TRIEU TOLD US HE
HAD NOT SIGNED LETTER AND HAD NOT GIVEN GROUP PERMISSION TO
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAIGON 02938 151449Z

USE HIS NAME. FURTHER, HE SAID HE DISAGREED WITH SUBSTANCE

OF LETTER WITH RESPECT TO QUESTION OF WITHHOLDING AID. HE SAID OTHER DEPUTIES LISTED AS SIGNERS WERE IN SAME POSITION. DESPITE THIS, TRIEU SAID HE HAD DONE NOTHING TO DISCLAIM LETTER PUBLICLY BECAUSE HE DID NOT WISH TO DISAPPOINT HIS COLLEAGUES OR CREATE PUBLIC IMPRESSION OF DISSENSION WITHIN RANKS OF OPPOSITION.

3. SHORTLY AFTER CODEL'S DEPARTURE, NRF LEADER SENATOR VU VAN MAU INSISTED TO MINPOL THAT HE WAS NOT AGAINST US AID TO VIETNAM. MAU RECOGNIZED THAT AID WAS VITAL TO THE COUNTRY AND SAID ALL HIS GROUP WAS TRYING TO DO WAS REFORM THE GOV'T.

4. IN RECENT CONVERSATION, LEADER OF THE LOWER HOUSE OPPOSITION DEPUTIES, TRAN VAN TUYEN, TOLD EMBOFFS AND SENIOR INSPECTOR AMBASSADOR KING THAT HIS GROUP WANTED AID WITHOUT WHICH THEY RECOGNIZED THEY WOULD HAVE NO CHANCE TO STAND UP TO THE COMMUNISTS. HE INSISTED THIS WAS THE PUBLIC POSITION OF HIS 27 MEMBER PEOPLE'S SOCIETY BLOC. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE LETTER OF 47 WHICH HE AND HIS BLOC SIGNED HE BRUSHED THIS ASIDE AS THE RESULT OF COMPROMISE WITH ALLIES IN LOWER HOUSE AND NOT HIS TRUE POSITION. AMBASSADOR KING POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT IMPRESSION CODEL LEFT WITH WAS THAT OPPOSITION OPPOSED AID.

5. PEOPLES ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT LEADER FR TRAN HUU THANH HAS ON FREQUENT OCCASIONS TOLD VISITORS THAT HE IS NOT TRYING TO UNSEAT PRESIDENT THIEU BUT TO REFORM THE GOVERNMENT. IN LATE FEBRUARY, FR THANH IS REPORTED AS TELLING WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES DELEGATES THAT PACM STRONGLY DESIRES A CONTINUATION OF ADEQUATE MILITARY ASSISTANCE LEVELS. HE CONFIRMED THIS PRIVATELY TO CONGRESSMAN STEVE SYMMS ON MARCH 4. DESPITE FR THANH'S PRIVATE POSITION, PACM ISSUED A STATEMENT ON FEBRUARY 14 CON-DEMNING COMMUNIST ATTACK BUT ALSO BITTERLY CRITICIZING PRESIDENT THIEU. PACM RELEASE CLOSED BY CHARGING PRESIDENT THIEU GOVERNED ONLY WITH SUPPORT OF US GOVERNMENT, THAT THIS WAS A DANGER TO THE NATION AND, IF CONTINUED, SAIGON WOULD BECOME ANOTHER PHNOM PENH.

6. COMMENT: CAREFREE AND INGENUOUS WAY IN WHICH OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE ADMITTED OPINIONS ON VITAL QUESTION OF US ASSISTANCE AT VARIANCE WITH THEIR PUBLIC POSITIONS STRONGLY SUGGESTS THEY ARE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAIGON 02938 151449Z

SIMPLY PLAYING POLITICS WITHW QUESTION. OPPOSITION TO AID BY RADICAL BUT NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION IS EXPLAINED BY OTHER POLITICAL OBSERVERS AS RESULT OF ANGER AT PRESIDENT THIEU, ESPECIALLY AFTER RECENT CLOSING OF NEWSPAPERS, BUT NOT A WELL THOUGHT OUT POSITION. REASON OPPOSITION WILLING PLAY POLITICS WITH SO VITAL AN ISSUE IS PROBABLY THAT THEY, LIKE MOST VIETNAMESE, REMAIN CONVINCED THAT US WOULD NOT, IN FINAL ANALYSIS, FAIL TO GIVE VIETNAM WHAT IT REALLY NEEDS.

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